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The Public Schools of Mississippi

Citizens' Councils of America

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SCHOOLS

THE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
OF
MISSISSIPPI

With thanks for
your assistance
W. M. Grady

The Public Schools Of Mississippi

Mississippi recently has been accused of injustice toward colored school children and among the complainants we find some of our own legislators and teachers, who seem to have been brainwashed, "unbeknownst". I undertake to show by official figures that these charges are untrue with regard to the State and especially untrue as to my County, Jefferson.

As background The writer has composed this little essay mainly for his fellow

members of the Jefferson County

Citizens' Council. He hopes some of

them in the present whirlpool of

work and excitement will have time

to read it. Should it reach any of

those who have accused us of un-

kindness to colored children, it may

help to restore their loyalty; they

cannot laugh off the facts.

With thanks for
your assistance
W. M. Drake

The Public Schools Of Mississippi

Mississippi recently has been accused of injustice toward colored school children and among the complainants we find some of our own legislators and teachers, who seem to have been brainwashed, "unbeknownst". I undertake to show by official figures that these charges are untrue with regard to the State and especially untrue as to my County, Jefferson.

As background let us take the Decennial Census figures for population by race of Mississippi and of Jefferson County, 1860 to 1950, inclusive, embracing a hundred years.

Table I—Population by Race for 100 Years

		White	Negro	Total
1860	State	354,699	436,696	791,395
	Jefferson County	2,918	12,431	15,349
1870	State	382,896	444,201	827,097
	Jefferson County	3,215	10,683	13,898
1880	State	479,378	650,291	1,129,597
	Jefferson County	4,260	13,051	17,314
1890	State	544,851	742,559	1,289,600
	Jefferson County	3,589	15,356	18,947
1900	State	641,200	907,630	1,551,270
	Jefferson County	4,020	17,270	21,290
1910	State	786,111	1,009,487	1,797,114
	Jefferson County	3,934	14,287	18,221
1920	State	853,962	936,656	1,790,618
	Jefferson County	3,956	11,959	15,946
1930	State	998,077	1,011,744	2,009,831
	Jefferson County	3,423	10,838	14,291
1940	State	1,100,327	1,077,469	2,177,796
	Jefferson County	3,206	10,763	13,969
1950	State	1,188,429	986,707	2,178,914
	Jefferson County	2,887	8,416	11,303

Population of Jefferson County has increased since 1950.

The next table will show the immediate economic effect of the Civil War upon Mississippi.

**Table II—Total Assessed Valuation of Mississippi,
1860 and 1870**

	Real Property	Personal Property	Total
1860	\$157,836,737	\$351,636,175	\$509,472,912
1870	\$118,278,400	\$ 59,000,430	\$177,278,830
Shrinkage	\$ 39,558,337	\$292,635,745	\$332,194,082

There was a loss of 25% in realty and of 83% in personal property, this last being due mainly, of course, to sudden transition in 1865 from slavery to freedom of more than 400,000 colored people. (See Table I). Total wealth was reduced about 65%. Emancipation had not come, as in the British Empire, with payment by Government for every slave set free or, as elsewhere, by the fixing of freedom at a future date, so that adjustment could be made; it had been summary and complete and not only without compensation but under circumstances that made the new freemen difficult to deal with as employees and neighbors. Moreover Confederate bonds and currency had become irrevocably worthless and thousands of the young men of the State had been killed, thousands more were handicapped for life by serious wounds.

The following table (Table III) is to show economic condition of the State and of Jefferson County at close of Federal Reconstruction and on down to 1950. Figures for the State are from Census Bureau; for County from Census, Mississippi Secretary of State and County officers.

**Table III—Total Assessed Valuations of Mississippi and
of Jefferson County, 1880 to 1950**

	State	Jefferson County
1880	\$110,628,000	\$1,243,000
1890	166,772,000	1,607,000
1900	215,765,947	2,599,000 (1902)
1910	393,605,644	2,883,000 (1912)
1920	766,284,113	4,642,000 (1922)
1930	740,009,595	4,459,394
1940	575,304,329	2,950,006
1950	924,858,227	4,448,358 (1956)

WEALTH is shown in the foregoing table; INCOME also must be considered—Mississippi has always depended on the cotton crop to pay for its imports. The Mississippi crop of 1859 was 1,202,507 bales and thirty years passed before production was brought back to that level. As crops grew larger the price went down. In the 1880's it was below ten cents much of the time and in the next decade it was lower still. In 1894-95 the highest price in New Orleans for middling cotton was 7 11/16c; in 1898-99 highest price was 6 1/16c, lowest 4 3/4c. Today price is well above 30c.

Now for the schools. When the Civil War broke there were a few public schools in some counties of Mississippi but no state-wide system had been developed. Nothing was done in the first years of chaos after Appomatox, but the new Constitution, adopted in 1869, required a system of public schools and a statute passed in 1870 called for a school session of four months and authorized counties to levy ten mills for schoolhouses and five mills for teachers. In 1873 a general state school tax of four mills was levied.

In the Revolution of 1875 the white people recovered control of the State Government. They accepted previous school legislation and they accepted it again when they wrote their new Constitution in 1890. For the facts just related we are all indebted to the late Honorable Edward Mayes, sometime Chancellor of the University of Mississippi, who about 1890 wrote a "History of Education in Mississippi."

Under serious financial and social difficulties the new system of Education was steadily built up and after fifteen years Hon. J. R. Preston, State Superintendent of Education, reported the following:

Table IV—Public Schools in 1890

	White	Negro	Total
Public schools in state	3,348	2,429	5,777
Pupils enrolled	148,435	173,552	321,987
Avg. daily attendance	90,716	101,710	192,426
Teachers' salaries, scholastic year	\$589,400.00	\$341,268.16	\$930,668.56
Schools built, scholastic year	Log 110	Frame 359	Brick 9

Hon. J. M. Tubb, our present Superintendent of Education, has given corresponding figures for 1955-56 (two generations later) as follows:

Table V—Public Schools in 1955-56

	White	Negro	Total
Public schools in state	834	1,575	2,409
Pupils enrolled	275,744	270,250	545,994
Average daily attendance	240,346	203,188	443,534
Teachers' salaries	\$29,658,202.00	\$15,541,511.00	\$45,199,713.00
Total cost of schools, including Teachers' salaries			\$64,619,410.62

In addition to the forty-five million dollars for actual teaching, shown above, we now have enormous costs, applying to both races, for transportation (buses and drivers), retirement pay, free text books, administration, interest on bonds.

The shrinkage in number of school units is due, of course, to consolidation.

The latest figures for Jefferson County, from our County Superintendent of Education, Hon. G. A. McLaurin, are:

Table VI—Jefferson County Schools, 1956-57

	White	Negro	Total
Pupils enrolled	534	2,104	2,638
Teachers' salaries	\$40,640.00	\$95,415.00	\$136,055.00
Other costs (Transportation, etc.)			94,525.00
Total cost of Jefferson County Schools			\$230,580.00

Of necessity in 1875 and for many years thereafter teachers' salaries were low and many schoolhouses were small. But wages of other Government employees, and wages in general, were low and many of our best people lived in very simple homes. Many colored school houses and their simple furniture were abused by the occupants. In 1889 the Greenville white high school had a building that cost "nearly

ten thousand dollars"; its principal, Mr. E. E. Bass, a distinguished educator, received annually \$1200.00 and his nine teachers were paid an average of \$56.87½ per month. About that time the pay of a private in the Regular Army was \$15.00 a month. Railroads paid their section hands 90c a day.

Salaries of colored teachers have been lower than those of white teachers. The reasons are on the surface but, strange to say, seem not to be comprehended by some citizens. Compensation for all is based on ability and experience also on grade of certificates—A, B, C, etc—which depends mainly on college work. At first, and very naturally, colored teachers were scarce, even for the lowest grades. Their compensation has been steadily rising.

Who pays for education here? Answer: The White People of our State pay for it. When the schools began to function there was little help from public service corporations and the Colored People had practically nothing to be taxed. Their contribution now is very small. They pay on many automobiles but these are mainly used cars of low value. Many of them in recent years through G.I. loans and F.H.A. loans have become owners of real estate, but nearly all of these come under the Homestead Exemption, which allows 160 acres surrounding a home free from tax except for bond interest. Homesteads pay ten mills whereas other lands pay the full rate (in this county 47½ mills). Our state tax laws are kind to people of moderate means. There is no ad valorem on household furniture or agricultural implements or work stock or cattle. We now have a state income tax but it begins at \$4,000.00. There is a severance tax on timber and oil but this does not affect many of our colored citizens. In Jefferson County twenty per cent of the total valuation now stands against colored people but because of the homestead exemption they pay only about twelve per cent of the county's taxes, although they make up seventy-five per cent of its population. See Table I. In Mississippi for about eighty years the white people have paid for government and education both for themselves and for an equal or greater number of colored people; in Jefferson County we have provided government and education for ourselves and for all the colored inhabitants, who outnumber us three to one. Building goes on, mainly with borrowed money. In Jefferson County, for example, we have just completed a new high school for Negroes at a cost of \$450,000.00 and we are about to build

a high school for white pupils to cost \$350,000.00. Let critics compare this with our assessed wealth, Table III.

Our Reconstruction statesmen were benevolent and chivalrous toward the unfortunate, rather helpless, people whose destiny had become linked with ours. These statesmen were not prophets and could not know the full weight of responsibility in regard to education which they were imposing on a defeated and bankrupt State. Anyhow the responsibility was accepted and it has been well discharged in face of financial difficulty, limited capacity for learning of many pupils, indifference of many parents, and the imperfections of human nature.

Response of our colored friends has been disheartening. We hear no acknowledgment of the millions that have been spent for them; we do hear from some of their leaders that Courts and Schools and Old Age Pensions are not enough—that we must mix the two races into one race and put Civilization itself in peril. If a gift made annually is treated with contempt, it should be discontinued. Self-respect of all concerned might be increased if each race should provide its own schools for its own children.

W. M. DRAKE

Church Hill, Miss.,

September 9, 1957


